



Comunicação e sociedade

Special Issue | 2019

Comunicação intercultural e mediação nas sociedades contemporâneas

Cultures, memories, dialogues under construction

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cs/824>

ISSN: 2183-3575

Publisher

Centro de estudos de comunicação e sociedade

Printed version

Date of publication: 28 May 2019

Number of pages: 13-17

ISSN: 1645-2089

Electronic reference

Ana Maria Costa e Silva, Rosa Cabecinhas and Rob Evans, « Cultures, memories, dialogues under construction », *Comunicação e sociedade* [Online], Special Issue | 2019, Online since 28 May 2019, connection on 01 October 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/cs/824>



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CULTURES, MEMORIES, DIALOGUES UNDER CONSTRUCTION **CULTURAS, MEMÓRIAS, DIÁLOGOS EM CONSTRUÇÃO**

Ana Maria Costa e Silva, Rosa Cabecinhas & Rob Evans

Contemporary societies present a wide-ranging and multiform diversity – of people, cultures, thinking, movements, etc. – a palette of possibilities and interpellant challenges of knowledge, values and actions in daily life. A kaleidoscope that fosters memories, highlights cultures and identities, strengthens discussions and vindicates constructive and transforming conversations.

The diversity and complexity, which characterize contemporary societies, appeals to complex thinking (Morin, 2001), thinking that surpasses binary logic and is interested in “creative possibilities that celebrate difference, diversity and complexity” (Schnitman, 1999, p. 20).

Intercultural communication and collaborative dialogue constitute essential conditions for “constructing collaboratively, discovering unexpected solutions or differing and agreeing about those areas that can be and are necessary to co-ordinate” (Schnitman, 1999, p. 20). In this case, the communication constitutes a process for the joint creation of meaning, through the construction of relationships, identities and visions of the world in a process of permanent interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This paradigm promotes communicational action constructed from dialogue and epistemic, dialogic, argumentative, narrative and emergent transforming perspectives based on a communicational and emancipatory rationality (Costa e Silva, 2018; Habermas, 1984) that underlies mediation.

In order to debate intercultural communication in contemporary societies we should not forget that in this so-called globalized world many frontiers (physical and mental) remain and many others are (re)constructed, hence the ever more urgent necessity to overcome a mere multicultural rhetoric in order to deconstruct “old” and “new” frontiers. As Cabecinhas and Cunha (2017, p. 7) highlight, we should not forget the profound inequalities and disparities that continue to mark our daily lives nor “to confuse dialogue with symmetry and inter-culturality with equality of the parties”. The so proclaimed dialogue with the “other” is often reduced to a folkloric dimension, which does not challenge the structures of thinking that continue to reinforce outdated binarisms. Openness to the “other” necessarily means a reciprocal transformation, a trans-cultural vision (Lopes, 2018), defiant, which could widen horizons and permit the creation of more just and inclusive ways of living.

Intercultural communication and mediation in contemporary societies is the title of this special issue of the *Comunicação e Sociedade* journal that resulted from a selection of texts submitted to and presented during the Second International Congress on Social

Mediation held in the University of Minho in April 2018 with the theme: “Europe as a space of intercultural dialogue and mediation”.

This special edition is composed of eight chapters – some of a more theoretical nature and others favouring the empirical component. The texts cover different scientific areas and deal with various socio-cultural realities in different geographical contexts, thus presenting reflections about intercultural communication and mediation from different perspectives.

The issue opens with the essay by Moisés de Lemos Martins, University of Minho, Portugal, entitled “The ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe – between totality and the infinite”. Contrary to focusing only on the fleeting present, the author offers us, through this essay, a voyage in time and the history of ideas, so as to better understand the ruptures and historical continuities of the relationship between “me and the other”. This essay, through its scope and theoretical depth, challenges us to look at the present “refugee crisis” in Europe, through a temporal denseness that is called for by the complexity of reality.

In the second article, entitled “Learning biographies in a European space for social mediation”, Rob Evans (Otto von Guericke University, Magdeburg, Germany) brings together biographical methods in a detailed analysis of the relationships of biographicity with language and society. The text, which he offers to us, presents a sustained explanation of what he calls “in-depth unstructured biographical interviews”, which document the cooperative learning associated with mediation and what it is to be a mediator in communities of practice, through the biographical narrative of a mediator under training. The author develops a “sharp” and in-depth analysis of this narrative giving an account of the myriad of personal elements and social participants involved in the construction of experience and in co-constructed dialogue with visibility in the sense attributed to learning about social mediation through European mobility.

In the following text, “Intercultural dialogue and intergroup relations in Europe: contributions from Cultural Studies and Social Psychology”, Julia Alves Brasil, Federal University of Espírito Santo, Brazil and Rosa Cabecinhas, University of Minho, Portugal, pull together contributions from different disciplines in order to analyze the challenges that are being raised nowadays in the field of Intercultural Communication. The authors discuss these challenges by means of the articulation of theoretical perspectives about the processes of identity, alterity, social representations, collective memory, colonialism and power asymmetries. Advocating the importance of a critical perspective in the understanding of interculturality, the authors emphasize the necessity of transforming social, institutional and epistemic structures, so as to (re)create ways of thinking, feeling and relating to others, which implies not only the simple recognition and tolerance of the “other” but also to active listening, dialogue and mutual transformation.

In their text “Dialogical mediation as an instrument to promote health and social cohesion: results and directions”, Gian Piero Turchi and Michele Romanelli, University of Padua, Italy, argue for the contributions of dialogic mediation in the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts and in the construction of social cohesion. They present a general theory about mediation, called dialogic, whose objective is to change the

discursive features of conflict. Taking this theory as their reference, the authors base the importance of mediation offered, as an instrument of public policy that adopts and develops dialogic interaction between immigrant communities and the receiving community, by fostering interaction and the construction of a singular and different community.

Margarida Morgado from the Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco, Portugal, in her text called “Intercultural mediation and illustrated albums” analyses the potential of using de picture books in the context of intercultural mediation with children and young people. Throughout the chapter, the author shows some examples of how a set of picture books from the IDPBC (*Identity and Diversity in Picture Book Collections*) can be used for exploring topics relates to the “super-diversity” of contemporary societies in order to stimulate empathy between the readers and to help children and young people to understand the complexity of their evolving social environment, as well as questions about migration and refugees.

In his text “The river as mediator – the recuperation of urban rivers for creating new spaces of mediation and intercultural dialogue”, Paul Chapman, PCEU Consulting Ltd., United Kingdom, reveals the process and results of a shared and collaborative work concerning the revitalization of a public space alongside an “abandoned” river on the periphery of London. The author presents with details the potential of the participative and conversational processes among several participants – environmental specialists, councillors, local community, consultants – in the construction of spaces for intercultural sociability and environmental sustainability. In this case, the “river became the mediator” and it constituted an element for strengthening collaborative dialogue with results, whereby everybody gained: people, institutions, community and environment.

In “Voices of women in the Diaspora: *hip hop*, *spoken word*, Islam and Web 2.0.”, Cláudia Araújo, New University of Lisbon, Portugal, analyses the artistic production of four *hip hop* and *spoken word* artists pertaining to the Moslem Diaspora, Poetic Pilgrimage, Alia Sharrief, Hanouneh and Alia Gabres with the objective of understanding, if such cultural practices could be thought of as forms of political and social activism with potential for extension into alternative public spheres. The diversity of forms of cultural expression tackled in this article is set out, as an example of diversity within Islam and also as a contribution for the deconstruction of social stereotypes, particularly about Muslim women.

The issue ends with the text by Vítor de Sousa, University of Minho, Portugal, entitled “Memory as a promoter of inter-culturality in Maputo, through the preservation of colonial statuary”. The author discusses the problem of collective memory and place names in the city of Maputo by making reference to the “new life” in post-colonial times of two colonial statues – one of Mouzinho de Albuquerque and the other of Salazar – and to the persistence, in the original place, of the evocative statue of the First World War, which was the first monument of the New State in Mozambique. He shows the importance that these monuments have for the preservation of memory in the life of a country and the possibilities of changing the manner in which the colonial past is evoked, in order to construct the new dynamics of the future.

In the present, as in the past, we are called upon to participate in the construction of dialogues, “interweaving loose ends” (Ribeiro, 2010, p. 198), fostering memories, socializing in diversity and making ties. In order to build dialogue between thought and action, between academia and society and diverse cultures with multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary knowledge, this issue of the *Comunicação e Sociedade* journal reveals this multiple weaving and dialoguing. //

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